



Citation for published version:

Goodall, J 2014, *School-Home Communication: Texting*. University of Bath.

Publication date:

2014

Document Version

Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication](#)

University of Bath

Alternative formats

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

School-Home Communication: Texting

Introduction

The value of parental engagement with children's learning is well known (Goodall 2012; Goodall and Vorhaus 2011; Harris and Goodall 2008; Harris and Goodall 2009; Desforges and Abouchaar 2003; Fan and Chen 2001). Such engagement can contribute to increased student engagement, improved attitudes toward learning, better attendance, and increased achievement. Some research suggests that there are particular forms of engagement which can be of greater value for families facing economic challenges, (Lee and Bowen 2006; Harris and Goodall 2009).

Increasing this engagement, however, has proved difficult for schools to achieve and for researchers to measure (Goodall and Vorhaus 2011; See and Gorard 2014). Information Communications Technology (ICT) has for some years been suggested as at least part of the solution (BECTA 2003, 2008a, b, 2008 ; Hollingworth *et al.* 2009). However, the uses of ICT between schools and parents remain largely uninvestigated (Hohlfeld *et al.* 2010), in part due to the fast-paced nature of change in the field. However, the potential for ICT to increase meaningful communication between schools and families must be said to be high, if tools can be used in ways which are time effective for schools, and accessible for parents.

Texting presents an obvious means of communication between schools and home. According to Ofcom data, 92% of adults have access to a mobile phone (Ofcom 2014), and 56% of adults have a smart phone (Ofcom 2014). Penetration of smart phones is forecast to reach 100% by 2018 (Mobilesquared 2014). This represents a sizable opportunity for schools, as texting can provide immediate, personalised communication, as well as more general, broad based communication (though the use of automated software such as GroupText or ParentMail).

Context

This project took place in the greater Bristol area. This area contains within it significant areas of economic deprivation. Academic achievement rates for the City area are below those for the Southwest of England as a whole, and well below those of all students in England, in reference to GCSE achievement (Statistics 2014).

Methodology

This study took place as a sub contract, as a part of a larger, educational endowment funded project, investigating the use of texts and school home communication.

Over a period of five months 16 interviews were undertaken. 14 interviews were face-to-face, and two were telephone interviews.

All interviews were transcribed onto pro forma. These pro forma were then coded (coding framework with results may be found in appendix 3).

Coding arose naturally from the questionnaire structure.

Sampling

The population for this project was all secondary schools in Bristol (32). From this, an initial group of schools were sent in an introductory email, inviting them to take part in the project. The initial group of 15 schools were chosen to provide a mix of academies, comprehensives, free and faith-based schools.

Initial responses to the emails were disappointing. Eventually, the majority of secondary schools in the Bristol area were sent an invitation to be dissipating the project. Other networks and contacts were also used to recruit schools.

The project ultimately recruited four schools. All schools were visited at least once in the course of the project.

A semi structured interview schedule was developed with the wider project team.

All of the early interviews took place during parents' evenings. This venue and circumstance resulted in some early interviews being rushed, and somewhat incomplete, as parents had to fit interviews in between meetings with teachers.

Because some of the interviews took place at parents' evenings, a number of the interviews consisted of more than one respondent: groups consisted of father mother couples (two, one of which had a child involved in the interview), two women in one group and one group of two men and one woman. In all cases, other than the response from the child (about sleeping), these have been recorded as "parents", and each grouping was considered as a single respondent, as they related to one child.

Ethics

All respondents were informed of the nature and scope of the project and interviews. 14 of the interviews were digitally recorded, and permission was sought and obtained for these recordings.

No personal information was asked or recorded, other than national origin, number of children, and Mother tongue. Names and other identifying factors have been removed from material quoted in

this report. Respondents are delineated only by a letter (and B for Bristol, the commissioning University) and then a number.

Results

(The interview schedule is attached as an appendix, see Appendix 1; results are available in Appendix 3).

Parents were asked if their children helped each other with their homework; of the families who reported having more than one child, 6 reported that siblings helped each other (in one case, “surreptitiously”), and two families that they did not.

Twelve parents said that it was very important for parents to help their children with homework. “Of course it is – Yes – You need to show an interest, you need to encourage... and just to keep an eye on progression” (B4) “Definitely important – you get out what you put in” (B7). Other parents expressed the same sentiment, “It’s vital.... Being aware, it’s absolutely vital” (B13), and “It makes a huge difference, it’s very important” (B15).

Five parents were coded as giving the response, “somewhat” to this question, as they highlighted the need for increasingly independent learning for secondary children. Even some of the parents who were sure that it was important made this point, “Really important to be available to help, I do help a lot” (B11)¹. “It’s important to be involved – parents need to understand it but it’s their [child’s] work – you need to support them.... They don’t understand the value of doing homework at this age” (B10). This was echoed by another parent, who said, “Parents are a resource for homework, but not the only route – you need to not create a dependency on the parent” (B13). “If children don’t think they need help, then that’s fine – if they think they need help, what’s when you must be there- if they’re seeking help it’s the parent’s role” (B12).

One parent reported that as she had little help with homework as a child, she had mixed feelings about helping her own child. However, as the parent continued to discuss the issue, it became clear that she did offer help and support for her child’s homework.

No parents responded negatively to the idea of reading aloud to children. The concept of reading aloud to children received some of the positive responses in the project. “It’s terribly important – I think children learn about language by listening – don’t think they can learn to read or write without listening first” (B12), “Absolutely, I used to sit there and read the paper to them, when he was about

¹ All respondents are referred to by number: B (signifying Bristol, used for all respondents) and then a unique number.

three weeks old, yes, I do, very important" (B5). One parent pointed out, "For one thing, it's a thing you do exclusively with them" (B11). There were no dissenting or unsure answers to this question.

One parent summed up the issue in this way, "It's the language they learn and the talking to them and reading to them. Round the table, after tea, before tea just when you've got a minute with them...They talk so much – if you ever met my son, you wouldn't get a word in edgeways. And I think that's from when we always talked to him even from when he was a baby we'd always just talk to him and read to him and when we had relatives down I'd say "Can you just read that book to him?" It's very important" (B16).

One parent who did not have English as a mother tongue, read to her child in her own language, while her husband read to the child in English; (the mother reported that the child is bilingual).

Parents were less united on the value of academic success to children's futures, with two answering that this was very important, and five being coded as seeing it as somewhat important. While no parents denied its importance, the responses were not wholeheartedly behind the concept. "One day I think it's vital and then the next I don't" (B12). "I don't think it's everything – I think it can serve a purpose... it's not everything – it opens doors but there are other doors they can open for themselves" (B11). "I think there's more importance put on it than maybe needs to be at times, so much so that people who may not have certain abilities are encouraged to overachieve" (B4).

The issue of who has the most influence on secondary age students again divided parents. Eight parents held that they had the greatest influence on their children, "Parents are the big influences – if parents don't care, then children won't" (B6). This accords with the findings of previous research (Harris and Goodall 2007). Another parent pointed out that parental actions are important, "No amount of me saying "do something" will make a difference but how I behave still makes a difference" (B12). "On behaviour, parents, absolutely – too much is put on the teachers – they are with one teacher, what, three hours a week?" (B13) Two parents thought that peers were the greatest influence and two added that teachers were an influence either by themselves, or influenced children because of a desire on the part of the child to please a particular teacher.

Other parents mentioned the importance of the child, themselves, "I think partly it's them, themselves, they've got to have that, "I want to learn, I want to achieve, I want to know more", they've got to have that thirst for knowledge" (B16). "[influence] In terms of performance, probably the child himself – the child probably has a 70% ability to affect the mark" (B13). Seven parents suggested that a mix of influences – home, school, peers – were at work.

In response to the question of whether or not being involved in their children's education was stressful, 5 parents said yes, 3 said no, and 6 gave answers that were somewhere in between the

two. Some found other words to describe their involvement, “It’s demanding, but I wouldn’t call it stressful” (B11), “More confusing than stressful” (B10). Other parents delineated what was stressful, “The only bit I find stressful is the communication part, especially with homework; it’s never very clear, the homework part” (B13)

Another mentioned the time involved, “Not only just for the amount of time I spend kind of jumping up and down and making them do stuff but also the amount of time I think it takes to get involved with the school and find out what they need to be learning....” (B5).

Those who did experience stress mentioned their own lack of confidence, particularly resulting from the switch from primary to secondary school, “The security blanket is whipped away” (B9). Even one parent who did not find engagement stressful mentioned the change between the two, “Going to senior school with that withdrawal of day to day responsibility of being around” (B1).

This theme of the difference between primary and secondary school continued in the responses to the next question, about social barriers inhibiting engagement, “Yeah, there are social barriers – within the social scheme, there’s a feeling that secondary parents are left behind... At primary school, you’re involved, but not at secondary. It’s not created by the school – parents are expected to let go of their secondary children” (B11). Another parent mentioned “I’m not a professional... it’s difficult to be taken seriously by teachers when you make a stand; it’s easy to be dismissed” (B12).

Some parents did, however, retain the habit from primary school of interacting with the parents of other children; 10 said that they did this, one that they did not, 3 one that they did to a limited extent. “Yes, I do, a bit – it’s much harder to contact them in secondary, it’s not like in primary where you’re all standing around. It depends to a great extent on the child making the links...” (B12). “Yes, we do [talk to parents of classmates] – he’s still friends with a lot of children he was at primary with, and obviously you have more to do with the primary school parents than you do with secondary school parents but yes, he’s making friends and we get to know the parents” (B4). These interactions with other parents tended to be around school in general, particular teachers and what children were being taught. One parent was very positive about these interactions, “Oh, yeah, absolutely. We talk about the teachers, when she has her friends here. We talk about the rules and regulations – whether they are fair – about their progress, and what they want to do, what the school offers” (B17).

In general, parents felt that their children were getting enough sleep, with 12 saying yes, 3 saying no, and one child answering that they did not get enough sleep. Parents held that they had set bedtimes and a routine; this accords with reports that young people did their homework at the same

time and in the same places most of the time (see below). At least for most of the families in this small survey, this begins to paint a picture of ordered households with clear routines.

One parent who did not think their children got enough sleep (B11) felt that the children's natural sleep pattern "was the biggest barrier" to getting enough sleep, in that teenagers are "very active late at night" and suggested that the school day could start later to accommodate this. This parent did regulate computer use "computers go off at 9.30", but children sometimes read books much later into the night.

Another parent who felt their children were not getting enough sleep held that the barrier was the children's own desire to "talk to us and be around us when they are not at school – they want to be amongst people are not at school" (B12).

Interestingly, reported TV use was very low, with 9 families reporting 2 hours or less per night, and only two reporting between 2 and 4 hours a night. "Not even two hours a week" (B10), "On average, I'd say about 40 minutes a night – we don't watch much television" (B11). "Usually 2 hours, not more than 4". (B9). One parent reported that her sons would rather play outside than watch TV, and that the girls in the family watched more previously but now "They find that they want to be up and about" (B15).

Games took up a bit more time in some homes, "Games, anywhere from 3 – 5 hours" (B5). "He gets about 3.5 hours on the game "(B12). One family was quite clear, "They're [games and TV] not an issue, we wouldn't let them be; we laid the foundations when [child] was little so we wouldn't have to now" (B4). One parent also reported regulation of TV and games – having set times when devices were to be switched off and switching off the house wifi at a particular time. 10 parents reported 2 hours' of use of games a night, or less, and one reported 2 – 4 hours a night.

Most families seem to have set routine for homework, and there was a pattern of children moving from doing their homework in a communal area (dining area or kitchen) to their own rooms, as they grew older. There were 9 responses saying that children used a communal room, and 11 for children working in their own rooms – high numbers reflect responses from households with more than one child. In general, children were reported to have set patterns, and to do their homework in the same place and at the same time.

Parents were more divided on the importance of attendance at school every day. While all parents felt that regular attendance was the ideal, two parents were less enthusiastic about the need for 100% attendance. "I think regular attendance is good for routine, and setting up a pattern, but there has to be space for exceptions" (B11). "I don't think it's so very important; it's more important if they are tired to get some sleep and then catch up" (B12). The same parent, however, went on to

say, "However, there is probably a level - If you've got 75% attendance.. you're missing too much – but if you've got 85% attendance that probably doesn't matter too much until you get to GCSEs" (B12).

Parents were more united on the value of being on time to school every day, "Very important – I have to be on time for my job, so they have to be on time for school" (B9). There was only one slightly dissenting voice and even this parent said, "It's good to aim for that... we don't punish ourselves if we're a few minutes late". (B11).

Families were split when it came to reporting whether their children were absent more (3), less (7) or about the same as others in their year group (3). The one parent who reported children as being absent more than their classmates referred to health and learning issues on the part of the children.

In terms of performance against others in the same year group, 4 parents felt their children were at the same levels as their peers, and 3 above. One parent pointed out that this was a difficult question to answer as they did not know the marks for others in the year group.

Six parents felt they knew teachers' expectations for their children; one of these, however, pointed out that it was only at the parents evening (end of the first term/beginning of the second) that this had become clear, and would have liked the information sooner. Four parents did not feel well informed on this point, "No, I don't – we get targets but those are not quite the same" (B12). "Not particularly, actually, no – I think that's a bit woolly – you send them to class and you get homework but I don't think the expectations are particularly clear, no". (B5). One parent was quite adamant in response to this question, "No, not a clue and I've often raised that. There's not enough communication" (B18).

Another parent echoed the point about timing, "I know from parents' evening – would like to have more reassurance regularly, particularly in GCSE year... there are notes in their books and on pages that never come home" (B9). Another said, "We know now at parents' evening – it would have been better earlier – only limited targets come home. "We know about expectations in terms of behaviour because we signed the behaviour contract" (B10).

Overall parents were generally pleased with the level of communication from schools (but this must be balanced against the preceding points about timing and targets). Communication from schools was rated as "Quite a lot – it's improved a lot" (B12). Parents reported however, that communication could still be better, "We could have more" (B12). All the communication reported was used to deliver information – events, school closures, absence information. There were no reports of dialogue initiated by the school. Phone calls were reported by 3 parents; these were used to highlight good behaviour or performance on the child's part (again, giving information). Six

parents reported receiving emails, four texts, and seven mentioned newsletters. Other mentioned school websites and moodle (VLE) – these, of course, require parents to be proactive in seeking out information.

In terms of preference, some parent had no particular preferred way of receiving communication, "Texts, emails – anything really" (B11). Other opinion was fairly evenly split, with 8 parents preferring texts, and 8 emails. Others preferred to hear things from the child (B3). One parent was strong in a dislike of texts during the day, which were felt to be inappropriate to receive in the workplace.

Six parents were clear that they spoke to teacher and other school staff about issues and concerns, "I do, I absolutely do ,,... I think it's fundamental for understanding the whole picture of where they're at". This parent continued, "Parents don't know that they can communicate with the school – they feel that the school owns the children during the school day. But we gave birth to these kids and it's our right to ask as many times as we like. Schools should make parents aware that it's ok to ask" (B11). Others have found that talking with other parents had led to a change in their own practice, "I'm much more proactive" (B12). Other parents had not initiated such conversations but "would not be frightened to do so" if needed" (B7). Another parents pointed out, as seen above, that communication "has improved hugely...it's definitely improved" (B11).

Not all parents were so sanguine, however. One parent did not "know what route to take" to contact teachers, and continued, "that's part of the security blanket from primary school that isn't there anymore in secondary school" (B9). Another was not sure how to get in touch with teacher but was confident that they could find out how to do so, partially because of friendship with a member of school staff.

Eight parents agreed that they would like to hear more positive information about their child. One pointed out that this information does get home, however, "They're [the school] not good at saying why – they will say that the child has been a star in a subject but not why" (B10).

Another said, "It would be nice if teachers would share – like primary teacher do – at the end of the day, "Do you know what your child did?" They could initiate an email to share just one thing" (B11).

One parent sounded a cautionary note on this subject – when asked if they would like more positive information about their child, the parent responded, "I just want realistic information" (B12).

Only one parent had ever sent a text to school. The average frequency of texts from school was two per month, which according to one parent was "quite enough – we get enough texts – I don't feel I've missed out" (B9). However, another said, "We don't get them about trips, which would be

useful because my children have missed out on trips because I didn't get a piece of paper at home" (B12).

Eight parents felt it would be useful to receive text saying that a child had a maths test on a particular day, although one of these parents went on to say, "But it could increase anxiety levels... Children have to get to a level where the parents shouldn't necessarily need to know" (B12). Two parents, one who felt the text might be useful and one who felt it would not, hoped that the child would already have told them about the test. A final parent would not want to receive such a text or indeed for the child to be told of the impending test, as the child should be ready for the test at all times.

Much the same split was in evidence over receiving a text about what the child had learned that day; 7 parents felt this would be useful, and 5 felt it would not. "Definitely, yes – any subject information is useful" (B10). "That would be great, really good... if you had that, you could sort of work it into the conversation" (B11); "Yes, this would be brilliant, quick and precise, and individual – we could work on that point" (B9).

But not all parents agreed. One felt such texts would be "entirely pointless, you'd get too many" (B12), another echoed this with, "That would be quite long winded – it might be information overkill – it would get ignored. Maybe one a week or one a term would be ok". (B13) Other parents hoped their child would have already given them that information (B6), or, "Not really – teachers are there to teach" (B7).

There were no dissenting voices to the value of a text warning that a child's attendance was lower than their peers; one parent pointed out, "We don't always know how high or low their attendance is till we get that chart at the end of the year" (B11). Another parent returned to the concept of independence, mentioned above in relation to homework, "I'm sending him to school - if his attendance drops, where is he going? You want to give them that freedom and a bit more independence but you want to know that they're giving it back by actually attending school" (B17).

There were two open ended questions in the interviews: What is the most important thing parents can do to support their children's academic success? And, Is there anything else you would like to say about these issues?

Seven parents felt, in answer to the first of these, that communication with the child was the most important thing they could do to support academic success, "Just always being open to listen... it's not what you say to them but what you let them tell you... to really listen" (B11); "Talk to him, really" (B4). Aligned to this were two parents who held that the important thing was to take an interest, "I think it's being interested", (B1), "Take an interest... be caring in very small ways" (B6). "And sit

down and say, "Explain this to me" because it's very different from what I did and maths is very different... I wasn't very good at maths and my son knows that so he'll go through it with me. So we spend a couple of minutes at the end of the day just after tea and then they have to do their homework" (B16). Other parents felt that "being aware" - of school work, of what the child was learning - was the most important thing. One parent added that after school activities (tutoring, music) were important, and another that engagement with the school took pride of place. Another parent wanted to foster thinking skills, "Encouraging them to have their own opinion, talk in to them about history; trying to encourage them to be up-to-date with the news, either watching the news or listening, encouraging them to read" (B18).

There were fewer answers to the final question, due to time constraints; the answers also reflected the placement of the question directly following the discussion of texts.

Parents again highlighted that communication with schools had "definitely improved" (B5), but still wanted more, and a different type of communication, "...what they should be doing, what they should be learning, how they should be progressing; it's alright being told what level they're at but that doesn't really translate into what they're actually doing in class... personal communication about how your child is doing or not doing and what they could do to buck up a bit" (B5). Another parent "would like to know more about behaviour" (B9).

In answer to the question about the most important thing parents can do to support their children's academic success, most of the answers revolved around communication. "Just always being open to listen, that's the most important" (B11), "Being there to listen to children's concerns about their learning - that's really crucial, and that also includes engaging with the school over things like homework" (B12). "Talk to him, really" (B4). Other answers, though not specifically referring to communication, spoke of taking an interest, "The more I understand the school environment, the more I can help my child - it's better inside than outside!" (B6). Another parent said they did, "Lots of extra things - maths, after school maths work, piano; they do so much" (B5). One parent praised the school, "This school seems to have got communication spot on... I have no hesitation if I need to ring, and they will ring if she's done well - which is reinforcing to the student. When it comes via the parent that the teacher's made the effort to ring, the parent is just reinforcing the message" (B17).

Another parent provides a fitting coda to this section, in saying, "Communication - seeking the support of parents - you want to be doing your bit, so that everyone is on the same page. It makes the parenting job easier - more information and more clear would be good." (B13)

Discussion

As has been highlighted in previous research, (Goodall 2012) parents felt that there was less engagement with schools as their children move to secondary school.

Partially, this is due to the increasing independence of the young people themselves, as highlighted by respondents. The different nature of secondary education also contributes here, as pupils will be taught by variety of teachers, rather than one class teacher as in primary school. This has implications in relation to contact between parents and schools; it is perhaps significant that parents generally reported contacting “the school” or reception in the first instance, rather than individual teachers. This represents an extra layer of communication between parents and their children’s teachers.

Previous research has shown that transition between primary and secondary school presents a point of stress for families and children alike (Harris and Goodall 2009); the change in communication structure contributed to this stress for at least some of the parents in this project. This is augmented by changing relationships between parents themselves, as respondents here reported less contact with the parents of their children’s classmates in secondary school than had been the case in primary school.

It is interesting that parents report such low TV usage among their families; all but one parent reported that their children watch less than two hours of TV a day, while the average would appear to be 2.3 hours a day, nationally (ChildWise 2014); some parents reported that children had TVs or laptops in their rooms but still reported low usage. Slightly more time was spent on video games (the interviews did not look into whether these were stand alone or internet based games), but hours were still reported to be low; (figures for national use of video games by children are not readily available but a study in 2012 suggested that 1.6 hours per day was average) (Sudocreme 2014). Parents presented a picture of regulated households, with clear routines for doing homework and designated bedtimes for pupils.

It is also significant that in most instances when parents reported “communication” from or with the school, this is initiated by the school, and was also one way: texts, newsletters, postcards, websites. Phone calls were mentioned by only three parents. These one-way communications must be seen to include texting, as only one parent reported having ever sent a text to school. (It may be important to note that this respondent was also highly involved in school in their own right).

Two-way communication, as indicated above, did however take place. Most respondents mentioned parent teacher meetings; many of the interviews took place during evenings devoted to these events.

While it is valuable that parents feel able to contact the schools, and are generally satisfied with the level of communication, research suggests that school home communication is most likely to result in good outcomes for children when it includes a two-way exchange of information (Cox 2005).

And although parents seemed generally happy with the level of communication from schools, it was also clear that a significant proportion of the parents in this sample did not feel that they were well enough informed about teachers' expectations for their children.

That parents are satisfied may indeed signify that they are happy with the status quo. However, as pointed out in the limitation section, this was a convenience sample, composed entirely of parents who showed baseline to high involvement in their children's learning. Therefore the report cannot speak to the needs of those parents who might be classified as hard to reach.

Parents expressed clear preferences in terms of how they preferred to receive communication - by text and by email. This suggests that these parents are comfortable with and indeed reliant on ICT for school-home communication.

Parents highlighted the importance of being interested in their children's learning; this accords with previous research (Goodall 2012; Harris and Goodall 2008; Peters *et al.* 2007). Secondary students have previously reported that moral support and parental interest are the elements of their parents' engagement they value most (Harris and Goodall 2008).

Parents still place great importance on supporting their children's efforts in homework, again this accords with what previous research has found, in terms of how parents define their engagement with children's learning (Harris and Goodall 2008).

What is of particular interest is the greater value this group of parents put on reading with children, over helping with homework, (in that the value of reading with children was always affirmed, whereas, while parents remained broadly supportive of helping with homework, they also gave a number of caveats around this concept). This may simply demonstrate that reading with/to young children is easier than helping secondary students with their more demanding work, again echoing the greater difficulty parents experience in secondary school. Perhaps this also reflects parents' increasing lack of confidence in relation to their children's homework (Peters *et al.* 2007). However, this finding does present, at the least, an interesting idea for further investigation.

Recommendations

Findings from this project suggest fruitful lines of further research:

- Wider investigation into parental preference for the means of school-home communication
 - Also, if parents have preferences for the types of information communicated by these different means
- Investigation of the levels of two-way communication between school and home, and their correlation to student achievement, attendance and engagement with learning
- Examination of the content of school-home communication, and the relationship of this content to student learning.

Limitations

As with all other research, this project presents certain limitations.

It is important to realise, in looking at these figures and this report, that some of the interviews were extremely rushed, because they took place in intervals at parents' evenings. This means that lack of response cannot be taken to signify assent or dissent, but may simply be due to lack of time to ask or respond to questions.

The sample size is extremely small and very much a convenience sample. It does, however, seem to be reasonably representative of the areas involved; most respondents (10 out of 12) were UK born; all but one had English as mother tongue.

This research was undertaken over a short span of time, and with a small number of schools. Therefore the sample is small, and is in effect a self-selecting sample. In two instances, parents came to the school especially for these interviews; hence they were interested enough in parental engagement in children's learning to take this step. In other instances, parents were attending school for other events.

Therefore, it is unlikely that the sample includes parents who would be labelled "hard to reach", or parents who were school phobic.

Another limitation arises from the difficulties and recruitment to this project. No faith-based schools were included in this project, and no free schools.

Taking all these limitations together, it must be pointed out that the sample used here cannot be taken to be representative of all parents in the Bristol area, nor yet of parents nationwide. Care should be taken with any attempt to generalise these findings.

Appendix 1 Interview Schedule (Final)

Parent Demographic Info

- Born in UK? Where? Primary Language? Educational Level?
- Dad local
- # of children?
- Do they help each other with school work? how do they interact re: school?

Parental Engagement

- What is the most important thing parents can do to support their children's academic success?
- How important is it that parents help their children with their homework?
- How important is it that parents read aloud to their children?
- How important is academic success to a child's future success?
- Who has the greatest influence over student performance and behavior?
- Is it stressful to be involved in your child's education?
- Are there barriers to being involved in your child's education?
- Do you interact with the parents of your child's classmates? If yes, what information do you exchange/why?
- Are you aware of resources that can assist you in supporting your child? (Tutoring, etc)

Homelife

- Does your child get enough sleep?
 - If not, what is the greatest barrier to your child getting enough sleep?
- On average, how many hours of TV does your child watch on a school night? How about video games?
- Do you ever try to reduce the amount of TV your child watches or computer time?
- Where does your child do his/her homework?
 - Does your child do his/her homework in the same place most of the time?
 - Does your child do his/her homework at the same time most of the time?

School

- How important is it for children attend school every day?
- How important is it for children to get to school on time every day?
- Absent same/more/less than peers?
- Performing better/same/worse than peers?

Communication

- Do you feel like you know the teacher's expectations for your child?

- Do you feel that there are cultural differences between your family and the school culture?
 - If yes, what are they?
- How often do you receive communication from their children's school?
- What type of communications from schools do you *already receive* about their children?
- How do you *prefer to receive* communications from schools?
- Do you talk to school staff (teachers, TAs, etc.) with questions and concerns?
 - Do you find it easy to contact school staff (teachers, etc.)?
- Would you like to hear more positive information about your child from the school?
 - on how your child can improve from the school?
- How often do you send and receive text messages from school?
- Would it be useful to have texts such as the following? How useful? Would these cause you to do anything with your child?
 - Your child has a maths test on Tuesday
 - A message about what your child has learned that day and a suggestion for a conversation with him/her
 - A message about your child's attendance, if it is lower than peers'
- Do you think regular communication between parents and the schools/teachers signals the importance of schooling to children?
- Would you like more information on how to strategically communicate with your child's school/teachers?

Is there anything else you would like to say about these issues?

Appendix 2 Results Table

Item	Item	Number of responses	Item	Number of responses	Item	Number of responses
Born in UK?	Yes	12	No	4		
Do they help each other with school work? How do they interact re: school?	Yes	6	No	2	Other	1
What is the most important thing parents can do to support their children's academic success?						
How important is it that parents help their children with their homework?	Very	12	Somewhat	5	Not	
How important is it that parents read aloud to their children?	Very	12	Somewhat		Not	
How important is academic success to a child's future success?	Very	2	Somewhat	5	Not	
Who has the greatest influence over student performance and behaviour?	Parents	8	Peers	2	Teachers	2
	Others		Mixture	7		
Is it stressful to be involved in your child's education?	Yes	5	No	3	Other	6
Are there barriers to being involved in your child's education?	Yes	4	No	4	Other	1
Do you interact with the parents of your child's classmates?	Yes	10	Somewhat	3	No	1
Does your child get enough	Yes	12	No	3	Other	1

sleep?						
On average, how many hours of TV does your child watch on a school night?	0 – 2	9	2 – 4	2	4+	
How about video games?	0– 2	10	2 – 4	1	4+	
Do you ever try to reduce the amount of TV your child watches or computer time?	Yes	5	No	1	Other	
Where does your child do his/her homework?	Their room	11	Communal room	9	Other	1
Same place?	Yes	4	No		Other	
Same time?	Yes	11	No	1		
How important is it for children attend school every day?	Very	11	Somewhat	2	Not	
How important is it for children to get to school on time every day?	Very	13	Somewhat		Not	
Absent same/more/less than year group?	More	3	Less	7	Same	3
Performing better/same/worse than year group?	More	3	Less		Same	4
Do you feel like you know the teacher's expectations for your child?	Yes	6	No	4	Other	4
Do you feel that there are cultural differences between your family and the school culture?	Yes	4	No	5		
How often do you receive communication from their children's school?	1xweek or more	1	2 x month	2	Less	3
What type of communications from schools do you <i>already receive</i> about your children?	Post-cards	1	Emails	6	Text	4
	News-letter	7	Phone calls	3	Other	11

How do you <i>prefer to receive</i> communications from schools?	Post-cards	1	Emails	8	Text	8
	News-letter	1	Phone calls		Other	5
Do you talk to school staff (teachers, tas, etc.) With questions and concerns?	Yes	6	No		Other	2
Do you find it easy to contact school staff (teachers, etc.)?	Yes	7	No		Other	1
Would you like to hear more positive information about your child from the school?	Yes	8	No		Other	1
On how your child can improve from the school?	Yes	3	No		Other	
How often do you send and receive text messages from school?						
Send	1x week or more		2 x month	1	Less	3
Receive	1x week or more	1	2 x month	1	Less	2
Would it be useful to have texts such as the following? How useful? Would these cause you to do anything with your child?	Yes		Somewhat		No	
Your child has a maths test on Tuesday	Useful	8	Somewhat		Not useful	1
A message about what your child has learned that day and a suggestion for a conversation with him/her	Useful	7	Somewhat	2	Not useful	5
A message about your child's	Useful	8	Somewhat		Not	1

attendance, if it is lower than peers'					useful	
Do you think regular communication between parents and the schools/teachers signals the importance of schooling to children?	Yes	13	No	1	Other	1
Would you like more information on how to strategically communicate with your child's school/teachers?	Yes	3	No		Other	

Appendix 3 References

BECTA, 2003. *Secondary Schools - ICT and Standards: An analysis of national data from Ofsted and QCA by Becta*.

Becta, 2008a. *Learning platforms in action*. Coventry.

Becta, 2008b. *Supporting technology in schools: A guide for local authorities*. Coventry.

Becta, 2008 *Harnessing Technology: Next Generation Learning 2008-14*. Coventry.

Cox, D.D., 2005. Evidence-based interventions using home-school collaboration. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 20(4), p. 473.

Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A., 2003. *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review*. (Report Number 433).

Fan, X. & Chen, M., 2001. Parental Involvement and Students' Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1), pp. 1 - 22.

Goodall, J., 2012. Parental engagement to support children's learning: a six point model. *School Leadership & Management*, 33(2), pp. 1-18.

Goodall, J. & Vorhaus, J., 2011. *Review of best practice in parental engagement*. London.

Harris, A. & Goodall, J., 2007. Engaging parents in raising achievement: do parents know they matter?: a research project commissioned by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Harris, A. & Goodall, J., 2008. Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational Research*, 50(3), pp. 277 - 289.

Harris, A. & Goodall, J., 2009. *Helping Families Support Children's Success at School*. London.

Hohlfeld, T.N., Ritzhaupt, A.D. & Barron, A.E., 2010. Connecting schools, community, and family with ICT: Four-year trends related to school level and SES of public schools in Florida. *Computers & Education*, 55(1), pp. 391-405.

Hollingworth, S., Allen, K., Kuyok, K.A., Mansaray, A. & Rose, A., 2009. *An exploration of parents' engagement with their children's learning involving technologies and the impact of this in their family learning experiences*.

Lee, J.-S. & Bowen, N.K., 2006. Parent Involvement, Cultural Capital, and the Achievement Gap Among Elementary School Children. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), pp. 193-218.

Mobilesquared, 2014. UK mobile smartphone forecasts. Available: <http://www.mobilesquared.co.uk/blog/uk-mobile-smartphone-forecasts/>.

Ocfcom, 2014. *Cost and value of communications services in the UK*.

Ofcom, 2014. *The Consumer Experience of 2013*.

Peters, M., Seeds, K., Goldstein, A. & Coleman, N., 2007. Parental involvement in children's education 2007. *London: Department for Children, Schools and Families*.

See, B.H. & Gorard, S., 2014. *What do rigorous evaluations tell us about the most promising parental involvement interventions? A critical review of what works for disadvantaged children in different age groups*.

Statistics, O.f.N., 2014. Key Figures for Education, Skills and Training (Bristol, City of). Available: <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadKeyFigures.do?a=7&b=6275035&c=BS1+5TR&d=13&e=5&g=6486095&i=1x1003x1004&m=0&r=0&s=1411978040424&enc=1>.

Sudocrema, 2014. Children Spend 56 Days A Year Playing Videogames And Watching TV! Available: <http://www.sudocrem.co.uk/antiseptic-healing-cream/blog/children-spend-56-days-a-year-playing-videogames-and-watching-tv/>.